

Good snow-covered (yes, again!) morning from a still semi-dark hill in Rockport....

“Hope springs eternal.” This quote has become a daily prayer for me now. How about you? From an on-line source (idioms.thefreedictionary.com), “It is human nature to keep on hoping against all odds. This particular expression was coined by the poet Alexander Pope in ‘An Essay on Man’ written in 1732. ‘Hope springs eternal in the human breast,’ is the full quote. It very quickly became proverbial.”

I’m holding on to this one for dear life, and for the lives of all our Ukrainian brothers and sisters. The quote I have kept on the front cover of our Sunday bulletins is staying with me, too....

*“In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred,
we have the privileged vocation to be living sign of a love
that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.”*

✍ Henri Nouwen

Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian. He was born in 1932 and died in 1996 at the age of 64. He wrote these words more than forty years ago.

Not since World War II has the world been at such odds, and in such dire distress. Hold on with me. Pray with me. Do what you can to support our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.....

This morning we will take a second offering for Ukrainian aid in our worship service. We will send these offerings to the IRC (International Rescue Committee) and the UMCOR (Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church) as soon as possible. Should you like to contribute to this effort, you may place your cash offerings in the baskets we will pass through the pews on Sunday, or you may write a check to place in the baskets, or send them directly to the Federated Church of Thomaston, 8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, ME 04861. Make your checks out to the Federated Church of Thomaston and note “Ukraine relief” on the note line. In the greater scheme of things, perhaps this offering will only be a small “drop in the bucket” to help our Ukrainian brothers and sisters, but we have to do this. We have to fight against despair. We have to hope.

ALSO! Remember that Daylight Savings Time began in the early hours of this morning, so today we “lose an hour,” so to speak. SO if you come to church, thinking we begin at 9:30 Eastern Standard Time, it will be 10:30 Daylight Savings Time. You’ll miss church!

ALSO, I will post this morning's sermon on my freerangepastor Facebook page, and the Federated Church of Thomaston Facebook page later today, for those who choose to "tune in".....

Blessings to each one this windy morn from the midcoast of Maine.... Susan

“Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day...”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, March 13, 2022
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Luke 13:31-35

Will you pray with me. Compassionate God, have patience with us. Help us to understand the hard words of the holy text before us this day. Remind us to be open to new opportunities today, tomorrow and the next day to serve your good purposes in our broken down old world. Amen.

Do you know what you must do – today, tomorrow and the next day? Luke tells us that Jesus knew. He tells us that Jesus told the Pharisees who had come to warn him that King Herod was after him,

“Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’” (Luke 13:32-33)

Jesus was a divine man on a mission, and NOBODY, not even the most powerful government official of his day, was going to stop him.

These words attributed to Jesus come from what we might call his “crabby pants period” as he foresees his future in the midst of those who would turn away from God, and turn away from him as God’s human messenger. He was making it clear that no one, not even that fox King Herod, and nothing would keep him from carrying out his work on behalf of God.

We hear these stern words of Jesus on the second Sunday of Lent to help us get ready for what is to come in Jesus’ final days. Can we hear them, too, in our day, as we do whatever we can, today, tomorrow and beyond, to fight the dangerous fox of a despotic ruler who is bent on killing and total destruction in Ukraine?

But then, too, we hear in the next three verses Jesus’ sorrowful lament over Jerusalem – his very softened words for the people who will turn away from him in the end.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34)

Can we hear these words, in our day, as a beckoning to all those who would want to live in peace and harmony, calling us to care for them and delivering them from the cruelty of a death-dealing dictator?

From words of crafty foxes to mothering hens – what torment must have been going on in Jesus’ mind and heart as he continued to do what he knew he must do “today, tomorrow, and the next day” – cast out demons, perform cures and be on his way to Jerusalem where he would be killed. No wonder he had some “crabby pants days” in his brief time in ministry.

Several commentators suggest there are many “exegetical difficulties” in this short five-verse passage from Luke. Exegetical is a fancy theological word that means interpretative. This is to suggest it’s hard to find a firm and clear explanation of meaning in the words and the events in any real, accurate, time and place. Some verses may have been added by later Christian editorialists, particularly the last verse, “And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Luke 13:35) There is no way to know if Jesus actually said those words. It is likely he did not.

But it seems to me there is a “bottom line” in these five verses that can speak clearly to us today. “Today, tomorrow, and the next day,” Jesus knew what he had

to do. Do we? What is it that we are called to do, asked to do, commanded to do, invited to do... today, tomorrow, and the next day? (get responses)

Some days I seem to know firmly what I'm supposed to do – fulfill my responsibilities to you as your pastor, tend to my home and family, and respond to needs as I see them and can fill them.

But other days? I don't know about you, but I flounder. I question my own motives. I doubt my abilities as a pastor and a preacher. I worry about everything – which I know doesn't do anybody any good. If I do waste away a day, I lament I didn't "accomplish" anything useful or helpful. Maybe these are the internal "crabby pants" days I try to live through, while trying not to inflict my lament on others.

Then I wonder if Jesus ever had days like that, when he would say to himself, "Should I do this, or should I do that? How about if I just do nothing today but say my prayers and take a nap? But I can't just do that because there is so much need, so many in trouble, too many living in anguish and despair. I must be on my way, today, tomorrow, and the next day doing my Father's work because my days are few in number, and the work is so hard."

But earlier this week, I caught a glimpse of what I believe is the struggle, the despair and the longing of Jesus in this passage. That glimpse came in re-reading our Responsive Reading for today, Psalm 27. I read it again yesterday, as if I were Jesus praying these words. I read it in the same way Jesus' words are recorded in the passage from Luke for today. Can we hear them, trying to imagine Jesus praying them – keeping in mind the threats from both political and religious groups that had begun to be made toward him in his closing days. (read Psalm 27 again)

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! 'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!' Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!"

This psalm of lament was written long before Jesus was born. Yet, we can hear him praying these words, and words like them, right up to his closing moments on a cross, promising the criminal hanging beside him, as Luke tells the story, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Is there any greater promise, are there any more comforting words than these, we could hear from the Bible, as we are taking our last breaths, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

We are living in the midst of a world-wide catastrophe we never expected would happen again in these modern times after World War II. A deadly virus came upon us two years ago. In fact, March 15th of 2020, was the last worship service we held in "normal" times.

A virus is one thing. The deadly actions of a cruel dictator whose motivation is killing and destruction is another. To undertake these actions, to consciously and with malice kill women and children and destroy a maternity hospital, supposedly in the name of Christianity and family values, is an abomination. It is evidence that a crazy fox still roams the land bent on destroying all that is good, all that is loving and compassionate, all that is God-filled, to serve his own purpose, his own sick mind.

I do believe Jesus made it through all his trials, tribulations and final agonizing days because he believed in his God. He believed God was his light and his salvation in the midst of the actions of a crazy fox, and misguided and angry accusers.

The question for us is this, do we -- today, tomorrow and the next day – believe in the compassionate and loving God who guided Jesus in all his actions and beckons us to do the same?

Let the people say, “Amen!”

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, March 13, 2022 – Second Sunday in Lent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Claudia Rosti

Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.

An asterisk () indicates where you are invited to stand.*

***Bold print** indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.*

GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude Prayer of Penitence -- Tchaikovsky

Call to Worship

Pastor: When our hearts are troubled, let us draw near a mothering Spirit who shelters us with love and protects us from hardships that threaten to consume us.

People: **When others disappoint and leave us, let us turn to a fathering Spirit who takes up the cause of those who suffer and defends the sorrowing with strong love.**

All: **As we enter this shelter of love, let us take heart in a nurturing God who feeds us with the bread of grace and calls us by name to come and worship. Let us worship God!**

***Opening Hymn** “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” #140 (Blue Hymnal)

A Responsive Reading Psalm 27 (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 13:31-35

***Gloria Patri No. 70 Glory Be to the Father....**

Message “Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day....” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “God Will Take Care of You” #130 (Blue Hymnal)

RESPONDING IN FAITH

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord’s Prayer.....

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Offertory Duet, Rev Stonestreet and Alice Billheimer -- There is a Balm in Gilead

***Doxology No. 95 Blue “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow....”**

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “God of Grace and God of Glory” #577 (Blue Hymnal)

Benediction

Postlude Largo -- G. F. Handel

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, March 20, 2022
3rd Sunday in Lent – Rev. Dick Hanks is our guest preacher
Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9**

“For Jesus, God’s passionate dream, compassionate desire, and bold determination is to gather God’s human children closer and closer in God’s embrace and love. That mission and commitment is at the center of Jesus’ work. Like a mother hen, God, seeks to draw, embrace, include, and welcome God’s children into the family of humanity that God has intended from the dawn of Eden itself.”

~ Michael B. Curry, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2

Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters....

And we continue to hold in prayer the family and friends of Kathleen’s nephew, Heath, and also the family and friends of Fred Bagnall and Muriel Pinkham.

Please hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... **And** all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs among their members.... **And** all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far..... **And** all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel condition of racism

which continues to take the lives of too many of our Black brothers and sisters....And all those who have worked tirelessly for the building and rebuilding of our nation into one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.....And add a prayer for Tammy Whirly, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Kristin Parker O'Neal, Jo Ann Parker's daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi's Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter.....

Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email at freerangepastor@gmail.com to have her add or drop any names from the prayer list AND to let her know if you would like for her to stop by for a visit sometime. She's always glad to have a chat with you!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thursday-3/17/22.... 11:00 am -1:00 pm: Women's Group Meeting)

PLEASE BRING A LUNCH

Sunday-3/20/22..... Frist Day of Spring.....9:30 am: Worship Services

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Vegetable

Deacon for March, 2022: Galo J. Hernandez III

Reminders for next Sunday, 3/20/22

Greeter/Usher: Laci DeVarney
Corinne
Ervin

Coffee Host: Karen Wincapaw and

Lector: Julie Brooks

Flowers: **THERE WILL BE NO FLOWERS ON THE ALTAR DURING LENT**

Collection Total for Sunday, March 6, 2022:

Pledges - \$2159.00

Loose - \$159.00 of which \$100.00 was dedicated to Muriel & \$25.00 To Fred Bagnall.

Investment - \$ 4.68 Putnam

Deacon's Sunday - \$24.80

Total - \$2347.48

The 2022 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

**Federated Church of Thomaston
United Church of Christ
&
United Methodist Church
Together Since 1929**

Sunday, March 13, 2022

*“In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred,
we have the privileged vocation to be living sign of a love
that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.”*

✍️ Henri Nouwen

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To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com
WiFi password is #1Church